

CIA chief denies assassination claims

By JAMES WENSITS

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SOUTH BEND — Former President Richard M. Nixon's proposal to order the assassination of Saddam Hussein would be illegal, Central Intelligence Agency director William Webster said Wednesday night.

"A contract on Saddam Hussein would have to be declined," Webster told a standing-room-only crowd of mostly students in the Hesburgh Library auditorium at the University of Notre Dame.

The answer was in response to one of a series of questions posed by students to Webster.

One student wanted to know if there was any truth to a recent allegation that people involved in President Reagan's 1980 election negotiated with Iran to hold onto American hostages until after Reagan took office.

Webster said he knew of no such meeting. "I'm personally skeptical of it," he said.

The CIA director said the policy against assassination was set in an executive order issued by President Gerald Ford, who succeeded Nixon as president.

In a television interview broadcast Sunday on the CBS-TV "60 Minutes" program, Nixon said he would authorize a CIA hit on Saddam to prevent the Iraqi leader from resurrecting his country's armed forces.

Nixon called Saddam "a menace" and said, "If I could get him out of there, even putting a contract out on him, if the CIA still did that sort of thing, assuming it ever did, I would be for it."

Webster said the CIA's mission is clearly defined. "One of the things we do not do is assassination," he said.

The CIA cannot intentionally set out to cause the death of a public figure, but may have dealings with groups seeking the overthrow of a despot, Webster said.

However, if the CIA believes it is the intent of that group to kill the despot, then it must withdraw, Webster said.

A former federal judge who was elevated to the Eighth Circuit Court of Appeals in 1973, Webster became director of the FBI in 1978 and was appointed to his present position in 1987.

The students, who addressed Webster as "Judge" and "Sir" during the question-and-answer period that followed his address, gave the CIA chief an enthusiastic round of applause when the program ended.

Webster said he last visited Notre Dame 10 years ago, accompanying President Reagan.

The CIA director said intelligence-gathering efforts played a major role in President Bush's decision to stop relying on economic sanctions to force Saddam out of Kuwait.

He credited Bush with "a critical diplomatic achievement" in putting the sanctions in place following Iraq's invasion of Kuwait.

However, the CIA analysis of the effect of those sanctions determined that "we were destroying his economy" but the military would be the last element to be affected.

The intelligence-gathering effort needed to enforce the embargo was worldwide in scope, according to Webster.

"We tracked every one of Saddam Hussein's ships everywhere in the world," said Webster. He asserted the effort helped to shrink Saddam's supplies to less than one-third of normal.

Intelligence also helped identify the location of chemical plants and other installations and even provide blueprints that aided pinpoint bombing runs, Webster said. "Smart weapons made the difference in this war."

According to Webster, Army Gen. Norman Schwarzkopf told him, "this was the best-informed war ever fought."

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 The New York Times _____
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